

County Land, County Food:

McHenry County Local Food Assessment Executive Summary and Recommendations



October 2013

Acknowledgements

In the fall of 2011, the Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Commission (ACE) in McHenry County formed a Task Force of local partners to conduct a county-wide local food assessment. Openlands, a regional conservation organization, led the Task Force and produced this final report in collaboration with the Task Force partners that was completed in December 2012. The report was reviewed by the Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Committee of McHenry County and recommended for adoption by the Natural and Environmental Resources Committee of the McHenry County Board. On October 15, 2013 the report was adopted by the McHenry County Board.

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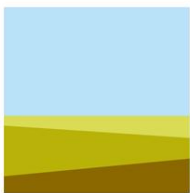
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Local Stakeholder Participants

Many local stakeholders were interviewed and/or surveyed to contribute to the robust data collection in the assessment, and we would also like to acknowledge their contributions to the project.

7 Restaurants in McHenry County
64 Local Food Farmers who responded to the supply-side survey
247 local residents who responded to the local food consumer survey
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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this Executive Summary is as follows:

- To share summary results of the McHenry County Food and Farmlands Assessment report
- To recommend actions and policy initiatives which promote a successful local food system in McHenry County.

Background

The McHenry County Food and Farmland Assessment project was initiated in order to support the viability of the local food system and farmland protection in McHenry County. A strong and sustainable local food system will generate benefits for the local community, such as expanding markets for and access to fresh, locally-sourced food, boosting health and wellness as well as economic viability for farmers. It will also support environmentally sustainable land use by expanding opportunities for strategic agricultural production and long-term farmland preservation.

In response to significant public input, the McHenry County Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Commission (ACE) formed a local Task Force in August 2011 to get a better understanding of the local food landscape in the county. The Task Force was charged with conducting a comprehensive local food assessment in McHenry County. Openlands, a regional conservation not-for-profit organization, led the Task Force of local partners and stakeholders including the Environmental Defenders of McHenry



County, McHenry County Farm Bureau, the McHenry County Conservation District, Woodstock School District 200, local farmers, county staff from the planning and health departments, county board members, University of Illinois Extension, and interested citizens.

Process

Conducting a community food system assessment is a collaborative process that evaluates a broad range of food growing and delivery related elements such as land use, food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste in order to improve the sustainability and viability of a local food system.

Identifying and protecting strategic farmland was a critical component of the assessment because successful local food systems can provide agricultural economic viability, which in turn supports agricultural preservation. Other critical aspects of a successful local food system include:

- reducing policy barriers,
- relationship building and education on shared issues,
- increasing infrastructure to support a local food system,
- matching supply with demand,
- and building local food branding and marketing.

The Task Force's assessment researched the current environment for local food production and demand in McHenry County. It also evaluated the real and perceived barriers to growth of the local food system. This two year-long process involved:

- a land use evaluation of suitable parcels and characteristics for food production, creating an inventory of local farmers who grow food,
- a review of the potential demand for local food and public support,
- ordinance and policy review.

This research resulted in a robust report (of which this is the summary) on the current conditions of the local food issues in McHenry County, as well as Task Force recommendations on how to expand and improve the local food system (found at the end of this summary report).

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS

THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Economic Development Analysis

To better understand the economic opportunities and challenges for local food production and sales in McHenry County and regionally, the Task Force analyzed current agricultural production figures, available market channels, emerging trends within those market channels, the market value of local food products being sold to local consumers, and population growth projections.

Market Value of McHenry County Agricultural Products Sold Including Direct Sales: 2002-2007

Total agribusinesses in McHenry County	2,084 farms
Total agribusiness employees	14,842 individuals
Production of grains, oilseed, dry beans, and dry peas	560 farms
<i>Sales greater than \$50,000</i>	<i>337 farms</i>
Production of vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes	82 farms
<i>Sales greater than \$50,000</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Production of fruits, tree nuts, and berries	25 farms
<i>Sales greater than \$50,000</i>	<i>4 farms</i>

Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service 2007 Census of Agriculture—County Data

Food and agriculture are significant drivers of economic activity in McHenry County and throughout the state. This includes both commodity and specialty crops, each of which make unique contributions—commodity crops capitalize on scale, and specialty crops on price and direct sales.



Thanks to favorable geographic conditions, namely prime soils, McHenry County farmers produce nearly one billion total pounds of food per year in the form of commodity grains, beef, hay, and milk. These crops are distributed through commodity channels where prices are subject to broad competitive market forces. Specialty crops, on the other hand, typically sell direct to the consumer at higher retail market prices, but on a much smaller scale than commodity crops. Given the two different pricing systems, there is

an opportunity to capture and grow a larger share of County food dollars by continuing to support a robust commodity market, and by further developing and promoting locally grown and sourced foods instead of importing food products for consumption. This does not mean a

shift away from conventional farming, but rather working to change consumer consumption choices.

Illinois consumers spend \$48 billion on food each year, of which only 4% is generated from local food purchases.¹ This also means that the majority of our food dollars leave the state, representing lost economic potential and reduced returns for Illinois farmers and businesses. Only about 7% of the dollars spent at chain grocery retailers stay within that given community; the other 93% of the money goes to pay processors, packagers, distributors, wholesalers, and truckers, all of which are often miles away or out of state.

By contrast, buying products directly from a farmer sends 90% of those food dollars back to the farm, keeping revenue within the local community.² The reality is local food systems have tremendous economic potential. One economic study projected that a 20% increase in local food production, processing, and purchasing could generate \$20 to \$30 billion in new economic activity each year for the state of Illinois.³

In addition to generating food dollars, local food systems also create jobs and an economic multiplying effect. The multipliers typically applied to agricultural retail unprocessed food sales fall within a range of 1.6 to 1.7. So for each dollar generated in agricultural sales, an additional 60 to 70 cents is generated in further direct and indirect economic activity.⁴

CURRENT STATE OF McHENRY COUNTY LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

Land Use Analysis

McHenry County has some of the finest and richest farmland in the world. The Soil Survey of McHenry County shows most of the county's soil is classified as "prime farmland" with very high levels of productivity. But according to the McHenry County 2030 Comprehensive Plan, farmland within the county will decrease 15% (approx. 46,000 acres / 71 sq. miles) over the next 20 years. While development pressures have slowed recently, McHenry County farms are still at risk.

Agricultural land use today

¹ "Local Food Farms and Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy." Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force. March 2009.

² Sustainable Table. (2009). "Why Buy Local?" Accessed from <http://www.sustainabletable.org/issues/whybuylocal/#econ>

³ Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force. (2009). Local Food Farms and Jobs: Growing the Illinois Economy.

⁴ Swenson, David. (2010). Selected Measures of the Economic Values of Increased Fruit and Vegetable Production and Consumption in the Upper Midwest. Research Department of Economics, Iowa State University, Ames: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Agricultural land use trends in McHenry County have changed over time, partly influenced by zoning requirements, Farm Bill incentives, market demands, and farmland tenure and succession issues. The majority of agricultural land in the county is used for commodity crops; a fraction of that amount is fresh vegetable and fruit production.

According to the McHenry County Farm Bureau there is a total of 215,584 acres in the county devoted to agricultural use, of which only 1,896 acres are used for vegetable production. There are 82 farms with vegetables, melons, potatoes and sweet potato production. Additionally, twenty-five farms produce fruits, tree nuts and berries. Although the amount of land in vegetable and fruit production is a small fraction compared to total farmland acreage in McHenry County, its food growing capacity can go a long way toward meeting demand. Data shows that every 1,000 residents in Illinois only require 1.4 acres of fresh fruit and vegetable production to satisfy demand.⁵

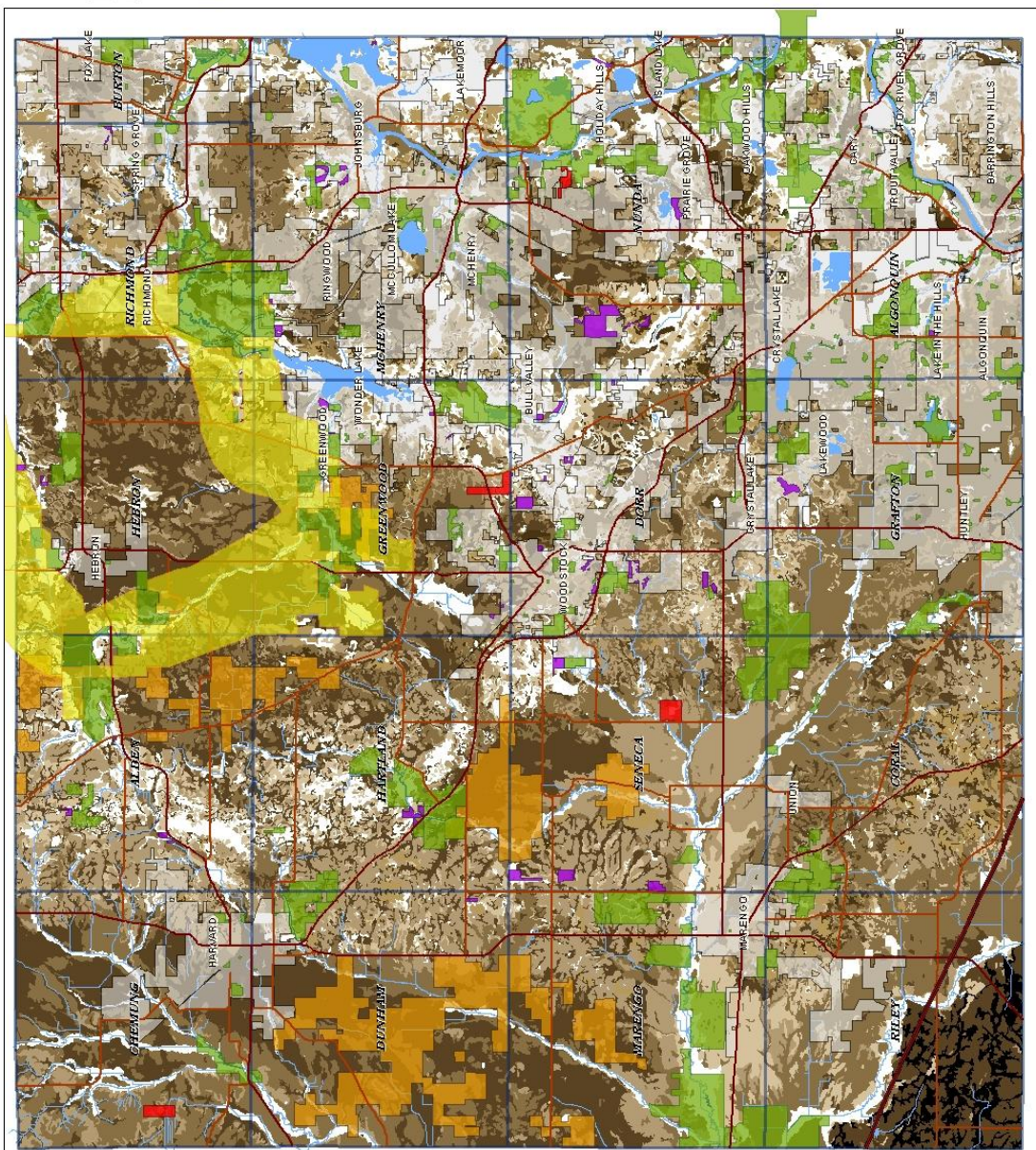
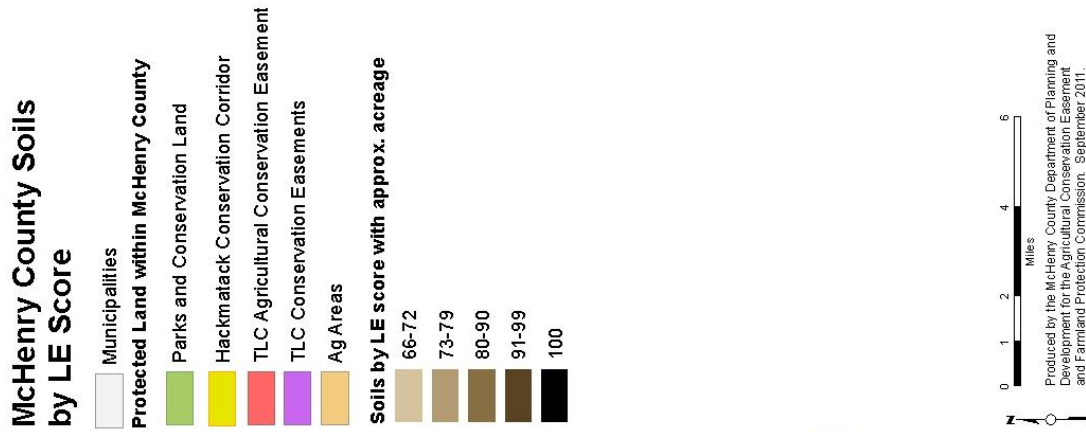
Unlike conventional farming, local food production is viable on smaller plots of land; but it still requires quality soil, relatively flat topography, and land protection. There is a clear and recognized need to understand and prevent prime farmland from vanishing in McHenry County. To guide sustainable local food production and farmland protection, the Task Force conducted a land use assessment to evaluate the existing conditions of agricultural land use, such as prime soil conditions, land with County zoning allowing an agricultural use, location of conservation open space or easements, and surrounding land uses, as well as other influences like demographic trends and land protection measures.

Existing conditions findings were built into GIS data layers for a land use evaluation map.

Data Layers	Use and Criteria
Land Evaluation (LE) Scores	Soil Quality
Protected Lands (McHenry County Conservation District, IL Dept. of Natural Resources, Land Conservancy of McHenry County easements)	Food growing as sustainable interim use, Natural area buffer
Community gardens and public parks	Fresh food supply for food pantries, small plots
Illinois Agricultural Areas	Recognition of Agricultural use (20,000 acres) ⁶
Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge	Complement to land conservation, agritourism

⁵ Swenson, David. (2010). Selected Measures of the Economic Values of Increased Fruit and Vegetable Production and Consumption in the Upper Midwest. Research Department of Economics, Iowa State University, Ames: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

⁶ State of Illinois Department of Agriculture, Division of Natural Resources. (2011). *Agriculture Areas Annual Report 2011*, In accordance with the Agricultural Areas Conservation and Protection Act (505 ILCS 5/1 et seq.)



There is a significant opportunity to pursue the potential expansion of local food production areas identified on the land use evaluation map. In many cases, local food offers the perfect complement to land conservation efforts. Further study should be conducted to determine the associated benefits of co-locating local food farming and protected land, including land near identified areas like national wildlife refuges.

Given population growth projections, groundwater contamination, and drought concerns, McHenry County's abundance of agricultural resources and opportunities should not be taken for granted. The land use assessment and companion land evaluation map are tools that can be used by the County to protect farmland and to target suitable tracts of land for local food production.

Supply Analysis

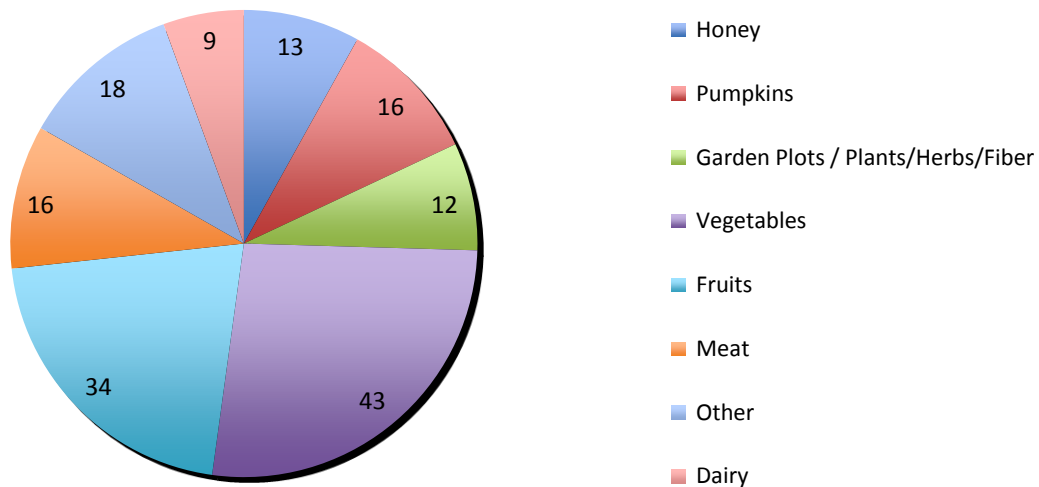
A local food system is characterized by its geographic focus based on the area where food is grown and consumed, also known as a "foodshed." The local food supply is an integral part of a sustainable local food system as the goal is to produce enough food to meet local demand. In addition to the land use analysis and map, The Task Force assessed the existing conditions of the local food supply in McHenry County through the following:

- creating an inventory of local food producers
- evaluating the local supply chain
- assessing demand

Inventory of local food producers

The Task Force created a comprehensive inventory of local food farmers in McHenry County. Only local farmers growing or selling food products were included in the initial inventory (i.e., no nurseries and tree farms). The inventory identified 74 local food producers who were contacted and asked to participate in a survey. The survey collected information including farm size, products grown, and where and how the products were sold. Sixty-four (64) or nearly 86% of the identified local food farmers in McHenry County completed the survey.

There is a variety of local food grown in McHenry County. While most local farmers grow fruits and vegetables, others produce meat, honey, and dairy products. This variety of local food products is grown on smaller plots of land than conventional farming. Thirty-five percent of surveyed farmers produce their food on 1 to 15 acres of farmland. Local food farmers produce higher yields on smaller acreage: one acre might yield 30,000 pounds of tomatoes and 12,000 ears of marketable sweet corn. But due to climate conditions of northeastern Illinois, the growing season is short, creating economic challenges to compete in the marketplace.

Types of Produce in McHenry County

This challenge is reflected in Illinois' food purchasing: 96% of the state's food expenditures are on imported products, not locally grown food. But there are ways to make local food businesses in McHenry County more viable. Structures like hoop houses can extend the growing season and processing value-added food products or extending shelf life by making preserves from local fruits can generate additional income.

A highly functioning local supply chain can also help address climatic challenges: farmers need cold storage, transportation, value-added processing centers, aggregation and packaging, commercial kitchens, and dairy process facilities in order to get their produced food to consumers year round. Unfortunately, currently there are some gaps in McHenry County's supply chain, specifically a lack of processing facilities. As well, limited access and interstate regulatory issues create hardships for distributing processed meat and poultry products.

Despite this, several traditional local food distribution channels exist in McHenry County for farmers who sell unaltered food products: farmers markets, grocery stores, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and seven County restaurants identified in the analysis. Other promising future market channels are local and regional food hubs, which in their early days are showing impressive sales performance and helping to retain and create jobs.



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a business model whereby farmers collect payment for pre-ordered local produce so their customers share in the risk of production. Fifteen of the specialty growers operate a CSA program in McHenry County, and one farm has a total of 125 families participating in the CSA. This indicates both the high level of demand for local food as well as the profitability potential of CSAs for farmers.

Demand Analysis

Existing conditions of the local food movement in McHenry County are not unlike other areas in Illinois. In order for a local food system and economy to become sustainable, supply needs to meet demand.

In order to assess this relationship, the Task Force conducted a demand analysis based on data from reports produced by the U.S. and Illinois Departments of Agriculture, including “National Farmers Market Manager Survey 2006” and “Facts About Illinois Agriculture,” as well as from a consumer survey developed and distributed by the Task Force. A total of 247 consumers, most of whom self-identified as County residents, completed the survey. Although the survey results are not statistically significant, respondents’ input provided some insight about local food demand and consumption in McHenry County.

The vast majority of respondents to the Task Force consumer survey answered that they normally purchase their food from a chain grocery store. About 50% of consumers responded that they do not know where the food they purchase is grown, and two-thirds of the consumers responded that they do not know if their grocer offers local food or not. When asked how well the local farms and producers in their community provide for the food needs of local residents, the majority of residents (60%), answered that they were unsure, while 31% answered that there was a shortage of local food. Therefore, many McHenry County consumers believe that their local food producers are not satisfying the residents’ demand for locally grown food. The overarching theme of the survey responses seems to be that many consumers in McHenry County know very little about the local food movement.



Nonetheless, in McHenry County there is growing demand from consumers for locally produced food, which is coinciding with increasing supply and availability of local food products. This

burgeoning local demand provides a key economic incentive for farmers to increase their food production and enables their small-scale operations to be more economically viable. Due to seasonality limitations of local food production in this region and other market-based challenges, most local food producers in McHenry County still supplement their income. But opportunities to sell into regional food channels and participate in food hubs can help boost income and minimize competition among specialty growers within the County.

Emerging Trends

The Task Force also analyzed important influences and emerging trends that will continue to affect the growth of the local food movement: the Federal Farm Bill, local and regional planning, food hubs, Chicago's push to increase local food access, and the rural on-farm and urban agriculture composting reform bills. Potential impacts on development of McHenry County's local food system are summarized below.

- The federal Farm Bill is the single greatest influence on U.S. agricultural policy and the structure of our food system. It is a comprehensive piece of legislation authorized every five to seven years, setting policies to regulate a wide range of food and agricultural issues, including but not limited to food safety, federal nutrition assistance, commodity programs, rural development, conservation, agricultural research, crop insurance, and specialty crop production. Given its political significance, the Farm Bill has great potential to influence the viability and success of local food systems.
- Local and regional planning plays an important role in promoting the local food movement by incorporating local food production into municipal and regional comprehensive plans and amending local ordinances in order to support local food systems. In northeastern Illinois, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) established a regional goal to promote sustainable local food systems.
- Food hubs are an integral component of a successful local food system, supporting infrastructure for processing and distribution.
- Increasing local food access to all demographic populations is a priority in the Chicago region. Although accessibility needs to be improved across the board, the low-income demographic faces the biggest obstacles in obtaining local food due to financial limitations, lack of knowledge and education, and transportation issues.⁷ Farmers' markets can apply for a license to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, which is a growing trend nationwide. This is an important way to make fresh, local food accessible to low-income populations.

⁷ Sustainable Table. (n.d.). Top Ten Barriers to Local Food Access for Low-Income Individuals. Accessed from <http://www.sustainabletable.org/features/articles/topten/>

- Composting is an integral part of a sustainable local food system in order to reduce and convert organic waste to a productive use. Composting organic agricultural materials is a viable way to divert biodegradable waste from landfills and effectively closes the loop on sustainable local food systems. There are also entrepreneurial opportunities related to composting.

Education and Workforce Development

Educational institutions and programs are critical to providing adequate training for beginning and future farmers and chefs that can help promote a sustainable local food system and economy in McHenry County.

McHenry County has various educational institutions and programs that are actively engaged in the local food movement and who have adjusted their curricula to better meet educational needs for sustainable local food production and culinary arts. Examples include:



Woodstock North High School Garden

- University of Illinois Extension
- McHenry County College (MCC)
- Loyola University's Retreat and Ecology Campus (LUREC)
- Woodstock North High School where students are engaged in food production through their school garden

There are also various partnerships among schools and community groups to support the local food movement. One that is most notable is the Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN) that has been successful in funding and developing local food programs at community colleges.

Policy Barriers Analysis

Local government policies, programs, and decisions have significant impacts on the viability of local food systems. The extent to which they enable and promote farmland preservation, local food production, local supply-chain development, and local food availability and access is critical to ensuring a vibrant and sustainable local food system in McHenry County.

The Task Force conducted outreach and collected information from local food producers as well as regulators from the Department of Planning and Development (P&D) and the Department of Health in McHenry County to gain an informed and balanced perspective. The survey asked participants to identify barriers to growing their local food business. Based on the identified

barriers, the Task Force reviewed relevant county regulatory policies and examined organizational structures and implementation practices at the County level that influence these regulatory issues.

By coalescing information from producers and regulators and thoroughly reviewing applicable ordinances, the Task Force was able to distinguish between perceived and real policy barriers to local food farming in McHenry County. This analysis led to informed recommendations for policies that will enhance local food production and distribution opportunities and support farmland protection in McHenry County. The recommendations are synchronized with the vision of the McHenry County Agricultural Conservation Easement and Farmland Protection Commission and aligned with the goals and policy statements of the *McHenry County 2030 Comprehensive Plan*.

Real vs. Perceived Local Food Policy Barriers in McHenry County

PERCEIVED	REAL
Zoning Regulations	
Zoning regulations limit agricultural uses in different zoning districts.	Farm animals are not allowed in residential zoning classifications in unincorporated areas of the county (R1, R2, & R3), which impacts activities like backyard chicken keeping.
Zoning regulations pose a barrier to the construction of accessory agricultural structures used to extend the growing season. (In actuality, they do not as long as setback requirements are met.)	The current Stormwater Management Ordinance can pose a barrier to constructing accessory agricultural structures. This is problematic because seasonal extension structures help farmers extend their growing season, and in turn, it can be a barrier to the viability of their local food business.
All agribusiness operators have to obtain a Conditional Use Permit as well as a Commercial Building Permit.	Only local food operators who sell food products beyond what is produced onsite or who add value to food products have to obtain a Conditional Use Permit and usually have to meet commercial building codes to operate their agricultural businesses. These requirements are inconsistent and complex.
Signage Regulations	
Agricultural signs have permit and setback requirements. (In actuality, no permit is required and there are no sign setback requirements except that they cannot be placed in the right-of-way of a road.)	Sign regulations pose a barrier because they only allow each agricultural property to have one sign that identifies the agriculture use of the property. The sign limitation is a real barrier to the marketing of local food products, such as at road side farm stands, and limits the viability of local food farmers.

Stormwater Management Regulations	
The Stormwater Management Commission's regulatory treatment of agricultural activities is inconsistent. (In actuality their treatment is fair, based on the assessed land disturbance impact of accessory structures.)	The expenses associated with a stormwater permit application poses a barrier because the permit fee can be cost-prohibitive for small-scale food producers.
Public Health and Food Safety Regulations	
The local health department strictly regulates local food production and sales. (This is perceived and there are other regulatory agencies involved.)	The complex interplay between regulations at the local, state, and federal levels can pose a barrier by creating confusion for local food producers and inconsistent standards. Some regulations are not scale-appropriate for local food producers and therefore pose financial and structural barriers to farmers.
All temporary food establishments need to obtain a permit.	Only temporary food establishments that sell "value-added" or processed food need to obtain an appropriate permit.
If you do not have a commercial kitchen, you cannot sell "value-added" local food products. (In actuality, the new Cottage Food Act permits the sale of non-potentially hazardous value-added food products at farmers markets, even if they are produced in a home kitchen.)	The Cottage Food Operation Act can pose a barrier because vending opportunities for cottage food producers are limited to only farmers markets, thereby hampering their business potential.
The only way to sell poultry products is to have them processed at a USDA federally inspected processing plant. (In reality, they can be processed at a state inspected facility if being sold in Illinois. As of 2011, there is a new voluntary cooperative shipment program that allows more flexibility for the inter-state distribution of meat and poultry products.)	Federal laws regulating interstate commerce of processed meat and poultry products can pose barriers if local food producers want to sell these products across state lines. The lack of USDA federally inspected meat and poultry processing facilities in McHenry County creates a barrier to access these facilities since the closest one is located in Wisconsin.
Composting regulations prevent businesses from composting their food scraps. (In reality, businesses can compost food scraps but have to hire a licensed hauler to compost the waste. This can be expensive, but it offers an option to these types of agricultural and local food businesses to compost their organic waste—like food scraps, manure, and landscape wastes—and divert it from the waste stream that enters nearby landfills.)	Off-site composting, which is sold for commercial use, triggers a high level of regulation and thereby is a corollary barrier for local food producers to compost. Health concerns are justified, but they need to be balanced with sustainable waste management issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force asks that the McHenry County Board and all of the local food and farmland advocates use the information collected herein, and in the full report, to make McHenry County a great place to grow, buy and eat local food.

EXPAND SUPPLY

Support local food production on suitable parcels based on land characteristics.

Opportunities:

- Support local food production as a buffer to protected natural areas.
- Combine the land evaluation map with County plat maps to identify small, under-utilized parcels where specialty crops could be produced. This land could be rented or purchased by growers focused on local food production.
- Explore using McHenry County Conservation District land currently in agricultural use as for local food production and potentially pasture land on an interim basis.
- Encourage aggregation of local food growers in areas that have many identified positive characteristics for local food production.
- Promote sustainable farming practices as an important way to reduce potential contamination of shallow aquifers and promote aquifer recharge in the County.

Use the land evaluation map for County zoning and land use planning purposes.

Opportunities:

- Implement land use protection measures, such as agricultural conservation easements to protect prime farmland.
- Integrate high quality conditions for local food production into criteria for agricultural protection programs.
- Identify and incentivize land protection of agricultural land with high quality features.
- Discourage incompatible land uses on land parcels with high quality soil (Land Evaluation score of 66 or higher) for food production.
- Facilitate the siting of needed infrastructure (cold storage, transportation, value-added processing centers, aggregation and packaging, commercial kitchens, and dairy processing facilities) for a local food system that is compatible with McHenry County's 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

CREATE DEMAND

Increase awareness of local food production in McHenry County to increase demand from consumers at the institutional and retail level.

Opportunities:

- Promote local restaurants that source their food from local farms.
- Advocate for increasing local food at schools and hospitals by overcoming pricing and seasonality issues.

DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND WORKFORCE

Create support structure for local food farming with educational institutions.

Opportunities:

- Support the Local Food Educator position at University of Illinois Extension
- Support local food curriculum development and on-campus food growing at McHenry County College
- Create school gardens in municipalities and support the creation of a Farm-to-school program in McHenry County.
- Support community and allotment gardens in municipalities

OVERCOME BARRIERS WITH POLICY

Promote agritourism and entrepreneurial opportunities for local food growers.

Opportunities:

- Support agritourism activities that support the perpetuation of agriculture and farmland protection in McHenry County.
- Create conditions that address the cost-effectiveness of agritourism (e.g., related to permit requirements).
- Support apiaries and chicken raising in non-agricultural districts that are managed in a nuisance-free manner.
- Create a new temporary use permit designated for farmers markets.

Promote sustainable management of organic and food waste.

Opportunities:

- Promote new small-scale composting opportunities of food scraps and other organic waste enabled by the rural on-farm and urban agriculture composting reform bills that passed the Illinois General Assembly in 2013, effectively making waste stream diversion more feasible.
- Create business opportunities for sustainable waste management (e.g., composting facilities and licensed haulers).

Clarify definitions in the Unified Development Ordinance and other policy documents that are appropriate for local food production.

Opportunities:

- Agricultural business
- Agricultural processing
- Agritourism
- Farmstands

Eliminate perceived policy barriers by providing more educational outreach, streamlining regulatory functions where appropriate, and strengthening coordination between regulatory departments as well as their communication with stakeholder groups.

Opportunities:

- Promote the efforts of the McHenry County Department of Health to facilitate kitchen sharing through a forthcoming policy. Kitchen sharing is a collaborative model to address both market demand concerns and capacity constraints by connecting local food producers and restaurant operators to share or rent commercial kitchen space.
- Support the efforts of the Department of Health to work with a regional consortium of public health department partners to promote a replicable model for kitchen sharing.
- Promote efforts to reestablish a seasonal temporary food establishment permit to reduce permit costs for operators and streamline administrative work of the Department of Health.
- Create countywide permits, where appropriate, to streamline the administrative functions of the Stormwater Management Commission.
- Support the work of the County's hired consultant to comprehensively review and revise the stormwater ordinance to help ease the regulatory burdens where possible.

- Promote cross-coordination of regulatory oversight and data systems sharing by the McHenry County Department of Planning and Development and Department of Health on overlapping issues, as well as increase stakeholder engagement with local food farmers and cottage food producers to facilitate outreach and education about navigating the regulatory structure.

Support state level regulatory initiatives that promote local food production.

Opportunities:

- Develop tiered public health regulations for food processing that are risk-based and scale appropriate.
- Support the continued role of the Department of Health in promoting awareness about cottage food registration and opportunities for cottage food distribution.
- Support legislation for tax credits for season extension structures (hoop houses).
- Encourage McHenry County's participation in the cooperative interstate shipment program to allow interstate movement of processed meat and poultry products as an economic opportunity for local food producers and processors of meat and poultry products to expand their market access and potential income.